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ABSTRACT

On November 14, 1984, the Navajo Tribal Council approved a new set of educational policies (the "Mission Statement") intended to improve the quality of education for all Navajos, specifically some 56,810 students in 223 schools on or near the Navajo reservation. The Mission Statement asserts that the Navajo Tribe, as a sovereign nation, is responsible for overseeing the education of its people wherever they are being educated and assuring that their education provides excellence in the academic program and high, realistic expectations for all students. Seven specific points are spelled out. The first point calls for age, grade, and/or developmentally appropriate curriculum and addresses the fact that in the past Navajo students were most often not on grade level for their age. The second, third, and fourth points call for true bilingual/bicultural education and are based on a number of successful programs on the reservation as well as the recognized value of bilingual methods in studies throughout the world. The final three points call for: (1) the development of self-discipline and a positive self-concept; (2) preparation for lifetime responsibilities in the areas of employment, family life, and use of leisure; and (3) an attitude toward education which encourages lifetime learning. (JHZ)

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NAVAJO NATION EDUCATION POLICIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION STATEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

On November 14, 1984, the Navajo Tribal Council approved a new set of education policies. The mandate is intended to impact on all the schools with Navajo enrollments from elementary to university, pre-school to adult education, professional to vocational. The new mission statement is made possible by the recent legislative and judicial developments encouraging increased local control. The policies state what the tribe expects of the various school systems, realizing that each may implement them in a different way.

The policy is a broad guideline that (K-12) affects over 56,810 students in an identified 223 schools on or near the reservation. Enforcement and monitoring of the policy is complicated by the fact that the schools are in three different states (Utah, Arizona and New Mexico); the state requirements affect not only the 146 public schools but impact on the 53 BIA schools, 15 parochial and 9 contract

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schools, each of which must follow requirements of their own sponsors as well as state law.

Another complication is the distribution of Navajo students within the schools. Some school populations are 100% Navajo, others 33% or less. Also, many Navajo attend schools farther from the reservation in cities, or even in far away states. None of these schools are listed among the 223 identified by the Navajo Division of Education.

This paper will examine the mission statement with particular attention to how it takes into account the social environment that influences it.

NAVAJO EDUCATION POLICIES

MISSION STATEMENT

> The human resource of the Navajo Nation is its most valuable resource. The Navajo Tribe, as a sovereign nation, has a responsibility to its people to oversee their education in whatever schools or school systems they are being educated, to assure that their education provides excellence in the academic program and high, realistic expectations for all students. An appropriate education for Navajo people is one that fosters:

A. the formulation of age, grade and/or developmentally appropriate competencies in all basic areas of academic and cognitive skills;

B. competence in English language skills and knowledge of American culture;

C. competence in Navajo language skills and knowledge of Navajo culture;

D. the development of Navajo and United States citizenship;

E. self-discipline and a positive self-concept;

F. preparation for lifetime reponsibilities in the areas of employment, family life, recreation and use of leisure;

G. an attitude toward education which encourages lifetime learning.

DISCUSSION OF THE POLICY

The council boldly asserts by issuing this policy as a mandate, the concept of sovereignty. It accepts the responsibility to assure that Navajo students are receiving quality education, even though it does not have the means to provide it to them. Such a plan obviously assumes the cooperation and support of the various agencies that do

provide the education. In fact, every level of government and every type of school has issued statements and policies which support the mandate (Howard, 1985). The policy statement also implies that, although the tribe can provide policies and support, the implementation must come through the interest of each of the school communities.

A. The significance of statement "A", developmentally appropriate, should be explained from a historical perspective. Up until the past 10 years, Navajo students were most often not on grade level for their age. It was not unusual to have teenagers in the primary grades and eighth grade graduation at age 20 or more. Recent years have seen much improvement in this area. The standards reflect the determination of the tribe that the Navajo students progress at normal rates through the grades.

B, C, D. The bilingual and pluralistic policy reflects a major change in community sentiment. Although bilingual education was promoted by John Collier, the head of the BIA from 1933-1944, and was beginning to be successful on the Navajo by 1944, it was dropped because of World War II (Young, 1944). In the 1970s, BIA personnel were indoctrinated in Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) techniques. The popularity of that movement waned, such that by 1982, the Secretary of Education reported that 86% of the BIA schools did not have any language program consisting of either transitional bilingual or ESL methods. The new

policy is based on the results of a number of successful programs on the reservation as well as the recognized value of bilingual methods in studies throughout the world (Diaz, 1983; Holm, 1982; Rosier and Holm, 1977). The physical and cultural isolation of many of the people also may be a factor which resulted in the emphasis on developing citizenship in the Indian as well as the greater nation.

E, F, G. These policies reflect the change in the community perspective. Parents and community members are beginning to think in terms of long term educational values. Education is not an end, but a long term process that involves every aspect of a person's life. School is not for academics only, but a place for the student to gain life skills and attitudes. The individual is being seen as part of a society. The school helps prepare one for personal, family and societal roles.

TYPOLOGY OF THE COMMUNITY

BUSINESS, INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

Indian parents are significantly more likely to engage in agrarian occupations, menial service related occupations, or be unemployed than non-Indians, who are more likely to work for wages in a societal setting, or at higher professional levels. Most of the major industries located on or near the reservation deal with tourism, mining or

power production. Many of the people are employed in these, in tribal industries such as farming or the saw mill, or serve in tribal or federal government positions or in education.

INDICATORS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF FAMILIES

The following information was adapted from data in the 1980 U.S. census and from other statistical references.

LOCATION AND POPULATION

The Reservation encompasses three counties of Arizona, two in New Mexico and one in Utah. Most of the people living on the reservation are Navajo. Table I shows that on the reservation proper in each of these counties, an average of 95.1% of the people are Navajo.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION COMPARED TO SURROUNDING AREA

On the reservation, an average of 92.4% do not use English as the primary home language. In contrast, only 54.3% of the people of the State of New Mexico do not use English at home. The average percent of high school graduates on the reservation is 34.6% compared to the New Mexico statistics: 80.3% for English speakers and 78.5% for Spanish speakers.

INCOME and LAND

The median 1979 income of all the families (including the wages of all family members) is listed. The $9079 median contrasts with the New Mexico State average of $10,657 (San Juan county - $18,815) and the Arizona average of $19,017. The percent in poverty status tells the real story of family income levels on the reservation: 49.7% contrasting with the overall Arizona poverty level of 9.5%. Yet much of the land in these respective counties is not privately owned. Nearly all of it in the Arizona counties and almost 60% in San Juan County, New Mexico belongs to the Tribe. Only small family plots are farmed and herding is on the open pasture.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The reservation covers vast sections of high, dry, rocky or sagebrush covered land. The traditional families live in isolated extended family units. Modern communities consisting of one or two dozen homes appear near schools or chapter house centers. Many drive pickup trucks over dirt roads to go to town for essential items. Students board at distant schools or ride buses for up to two hours morning and evening. Over the years, Indian students have scored lower than the average on national norms. Creamer (1985) shows some of the best BIA scores to date, yet the students still are from .5 to almost 3.0 grade levels below the

norms. Public schools report a wide variety of results with the Navajo, from "on or above grade level to 3 years behind.

VALUE ORIENTATIONS

Surveys indicate that Indian parents want their children to do better than themselves. They tend to trust and depend more on the schools and what they may be able to do for the children than the non-Indian does (atch 1). They tend to believe as Manuelito said in 1893, that education is the ladder to success (Underhill, 1953, p. 10). A respect for the past, the land, the environment, the family and an emphasis on spiritual rather than material values differs from the values of many of the schools. A lack of experience with schools and a sense of having no power keeps many of them from participating actively in school affairs or decisions affecting the children's education.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOLS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES

Most who are parents now attended school in a harsh and unsympathetic classroom environment. They were punished for any use of their language. They were told that they had no culture. Teachers had low expectations for their progress. A very high percentage did not progress in school. Today, many of the teachers are learning to respect the values that the students bring to school. The schools that align with the mission statement will expect the students to excell,

and provide them with an adequate learning environment to do so.

Most schools now expect achievement in English. Few associate this with achievement in Navajo. Even most bilingual programs are only transitional, with no competency objectives in Navajo. Before the Navajo language, culture and citizenship objectives of the policy can be met, schools will have to make big changes. Teachers and materials need to be prepared. Parents and administrators need to gain confidence.

The Title VII Reauthorization Act, PL 95-561, allowed local, indigenous school boards at BIA schools to have more power to influence school affairs. The tribe now runs the Navajo Area School Board Association. The Federal government has contracted with the Navajo Division of Education to operate the Johnson-O'Malley Act provisions affecting Indian student schooling in this region (PL 93-638, Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act). It is expected that as the Indian parents learn to use these new powers, they will positively influence the school policies in favor of their children's learning styles and needs. The expectations of the schools and the teaching styles, will gradually move towards the Indian and the Indian toward the school.

During the past year, virtually all of the various school systems have issued statements of determination to

comply with the Navajo Education Policy (Howard, 1985). Usually, each school is expected to establish committees and plan implementation that is suited to the local situation.

GROUPS CONSULTED IN THE FORMULATION OF THE MISSION STATEMENT

A number of individuals, groups and agencies were contacted during the development of the policy during 1984. This decision making process passed through six stages from policy proposal to implementation.

Policy Formulation

Public hearings were held in February and March of 1984.

Earlier reports that were reviewed: hearings from the mid-1970s, earlier proposed education plans, position statements from Tribal leaders, statements and resolutions from an education leadership conference, federal, state and tribal mandates.

Policy Deliberation

A policy planning group was formed from the Navajo Division of Education, with input from other divisions of Tribal government and Navajo Community College.

Authoritative Consideration

The statement was reviewed by the Navajo Division of Justice, Office of the Chairman, and the Tribal Council Education Committee.

Organization of Policy Support

Statements were released for public review and comment.

Hearings and workshops: public school representatives, mission and private school representatives, BIA school administrators, representatives of local Navajo school boards, contract school representatives, agency councils, representatives of state departments of education.

Policy Promulgation

Navajo Education Awareness Week: a policy review committee made the final revisions for submission to the council. It was composed of representatives from BIA, public, contract and mission schools, local community colleges, and other tribal divisions.

Policy Effecuation

The policies were considered by the Navajo Tribal Council in special session from November 14 to 16, 1984. The policies were unanimously adopted as a mandate by the council. The policies are still not considered to be

entirely in effect, since implementation cannot be directed or enforced by the Council. The Navajo Division of Education (NDOE) is assigned to monitor progress and provide conceptual information, resources and training as requested by the various schools. Since compliance by the schools is voluntary and much needs yet to be done, the process is expected to take years.

The NDOE is organized to monitor and assist in the implementation of the policy. The NDOE is working with local schools and with community groups, providing advocacy and support in seeking adequate education budgets, developing needed programs, and defending the rights of local communitites to be involved in decisions about their schools. They are working to expand scholarship opprtunities for college students and to seek additional sources of postsecondary funding. The policy book further details elements of the mission statement (atch 2). The Office of Bilingual Education is gathering bilingual materials, providing technical assistance and developing proposed certification standards for bilingual educators.

SUMMARY

To many observers and participants the policy seems altruistic and unattainable. However, the groundwork that has been laid in its planning and effectuation is thorough and follows the best principles of educational planning. Educators and parents can look forward to a new era of

growth and progress in Navajo education as they use the new policy to confront important issues and deal with them in the best interests of the children.

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ATTACHMENT 1

VALUE ORIENTATIONS OF INDIAN VS. NON-INDIAN PARENTS LIVING ON THE RESERVATION

Values of reservation parents (Indian and non-Indian) have been identified as including (Biglin, Vol. III, 1972):

Survival. (A desire to satisfy the basic physiological and health needs such as food, water, and shelter by earning a living). Indian parents are more likely to identify with land, family and livestock, rather than society and wages.

Personal Identity. (A desire to know who one is, where he is going, what he wants out of life, and how he is related to the world around him). One of the main channels for establishing personal identity is one's native language, for the Indian parents, but non-Indian parents were less likely to support native language use in school. Indian parents were more likely to feel the need of being interdependent with the environment and the non-Indian to feel a need to control and acquire it.

Community. (A desire to experience rewarding inter-personal relationships within the family community. A desire to be loved, supported, and respected for whom one is within the family). Indian parents tended to encourage the children in more freedom to control themselves and feel the consequences of their behavior, the non-Indian to control and dominate the children with consequences of reward and punishment.

Harmony. (A desire to live in peace, happiness, and tranquility with one's self and others). Indian parents tended to be oriented toward the past as a guide for the present, non-Indians tended to focus on the future and security through material acquisition.

Respect. (The desire to respect others and be respected by them, particularly in the parent-child relationships). Indian parents tended more to build inter-personal familial relations on others' expectancies and less on self-expectancies as the non-Indian.

Understanding. (A desire to understand the inter-relationships between events in one's life. Understanding why things happen and their scientific cause and effect relationships in nature; this understanding involves both physically observable phenomena and non-physical, non-observable and spiritual phenomena). The

spiritual aspect tended to be more important to the Indian and the physical for the non-Indian.

Knowledge. (A desire to be educated, to learn, to go to school, and experience new things in order to grow intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally). Indian parents informal education stressed the practical, personal, and broadly based career program. They have fewer experiences with education, are less critical of it and have higher expectancies of its value than non-Indian.

Autonomy. (Being in control of those events directly effecting one's own life. Not being controlled by others, but having the freedom to choose between alternatives). Indian parents tended more to associate this with local and tribal control in administration and school board, non-Indians felt the opposite. Indians tended to feel concensus was when individuals independently came to the same conclusions, non-Indians believed in rule of the majority.

Involvement. (A desire to be informed, sought out for an opinion, and being an active member in the decision-making processes that directly effect one's own personal life). The Indian parents expressed more interest than non-Indians in being involved in the school, but were actually less involved.

Assimilation. (A desire to know or incorporate voluntarily, certain aspects of a divergent culture). Both the groups felt isolated and rejected by the other. Both felt that they were a minority group surrounded by an unsympathetic dominant group. Indians wanted to learn English and incorporated selected aspects of the non-Indian culture, the non-Indians did not reciprocate.

ATTACHMENT 2

SPECIAL CATEGORIES ADDRESSED IN THE POLICY

Responsibility and authority of the Navajo Tribe

Education Agency of Navajo Tribe

School Boards, Local Control of Schools

Parental Involvement

Navajo Preference and Indian Preference

Education Standards

Curriculum

Education in Navajo Language for all Navajos

Education in Navajo Culture and Social Studies for All

Professional Training for Educators

Special Education

Education of Navajo Gifted, Talented and Highly Motivated Students

School Counseling Services

Student Code

School Attendance

Substances and Alcohol Abuse

Bus Routes and Transportation

School Facilities and Operations

Vocational Education and Career Education

Vocational Rehabilitation and Opportunities for the Handicapped

Post-Secondary Education

Navajo Community College

Adult Education

Early Childhood Programs